



CONFERENCE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

★ VIENNA, 6-7 NOVEMBER 2008 ★

Vienna City Hall

SOUTH-EAST EUROPE – MEETING THE CHALLENGES

FINAL DECLARATION

Adopted on 7th November, Vienna

We, elected representatives, mayors and political and executive leaders of local authorities and associations,

Assembled together in Vienna on 6 - 7th November 2008 on the occasion of the conference “South-east Europe – meeting the challenges”, organised by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, in close partnership with the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), to discuss the key challenges facing local and regional government in the south-east Europe region;

- Reaffirm the importance of good local governance as a key factor for peace, stability and development, and that strengthening local governance – in accordance with the recognised principles of local self-government – is at the heart of this process;
- Underline that local and regional authorities being closest to the citizens, are the most appropriate levels of government for all competences and tasks of specifically local concern, eg. in the fields of social services, traffic and transport, etc.;
- Recall that to carry out their tasks in the best possible service of the citizens, local and regional authorities must have adequate resources, and in this context particularly underline the key importance of a good formal framework for consultation with the central levels of government;
- Point out that the challenges faced by the local and regional governments of south-east Europe are serious and wide-ranging, covering such issues as urban development and planning, waste disposal, environmental improvement, and sustainable energy;
- Welcome the clear demonstration on the occasion of this Vienna conference of the commitment of the representative associations of local government of south-east Europe to working together to tackle the key issues we face;
- Look forward to continuing to build stronger links with and between local and regional governments in the countries of south-east Europe, enabling the exchange of experience and good practice, and enhancing relations between the local governments and their citizens;
- Recognize that this indeed constitutes the necessary and vital path to overcoming past differences by building mutual understanding and dialogue;

- Underline that in this context, town twinning and transnational co-operation constitute particularly effective and unique means of bringing citizens together, promoting mutual awareness and dialogue, helping local authorities learn from each other's experiences, and strengthening feelings of a common European identity and sense of belonging, with full respect for the great diversity that this implies;
- Remain convinced that it is essential that the process of EU integration and reunification proceeds progressively with good standards being achieved by all local and regional governments as part of this integration;
- Call on the European Union and its institutions to pay more attention to the key role of local and regional authorities in this process of European integration and reunification, especially in the context of EU membership negotiations, and regret the current lack of due recognition in this context, particularly given the experience of recent EU enlargements in which the local and regional spheres played most fundamental roles;
- Call on the central governments of potential EU Candidate Countries to recognise the special requirements of local and regional governments and to include the latter in the European Integration processes as equal partners.
- Request the organisers of this conference to consider reinstating the LOGON working group on EU enlargement, in the framework of CEMR, for implementing the outcomes of this conference and for enhancing work on European integration;
- Recommend that the work of the NALAS Task Forces be complemented by the experiences from local government associations of EU Member Countries and by an enhanced co-operation with the Congress of the Council of Europe and its members;
- Welcome CEMR's commitment in the coming years to enhance its cooperation with its members and partners in south-east Europe, particularly in relation to preparing for closer EU integration, and by organising initiatives of interest, and working in co-operation with NALAS;
- Further welcome that CEMR and NALAS have taken concrete steps in laying the foundation for a future closer collaboration in the service of the representative associations and their members in this region – the local governments of south-east Europe;
- Thank the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns and the Austrian Development Agency for their particular support in making this occasion of exchange and debate possible.

